

Talking Points for ADDI Briefing of HPSCI

19 May 1987

Antishipping Operations in the Persian Gulf

The level of Iraqi and Iranian attacks on shipping in the Persian Gulf has remained relatively constant since the beginning of the year with a total of seven to twelve ships attacked each month.

-- Iraq has hit 22 ships this year. Its efforts declined in April, but have increased over the last few weeks.

~~Baghdad probably will curtail operations in the Gulf until it completes its investigation of the USS Stark incident.~~

-- Iran has attacked 24 ships with a notable increase in efforts in April and May --probably reflecting Tehran's anger and frustration over Kuwait's steadfast support of Iraq and Kuwaiti efforts to enlist Soviet and US protection for its shipping. Iran has hit 6 ships this month, the most recent yesterday.

Iran still poses the greatest threat to shipping in the Gulf. Tehran has the motivation and a limited ability to sink ships if it chooses. Iran has increased its military presence in the Gulf steadily over the past year. Additionally, the Revolutionary Guard naval forces are playing a more active role.

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-- Ships in the Kuwaiti-trade will continue to be Iran's main targets.

[REDACTED]

-- Iran does not now nor is it likely to attack ships escorted by foreign naval vessels. If foreclosed from attacking Kuwaiti vessels in the Gulf because of US and Soviet protection, Tehran probably will expand its target list to include unescorted ships only remotely associated with Kuwait. Moreover, Iran probably will increase sabotage activity against installations in Kuwait.

The Soviet Union's diplomatic response to Iran's attack on a Soviet cargo ship earlier this month seems designed to avoid giving Tehran a reason to escalate its attacks while using strong language to deter further Iranian actions.

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-- Moscow's military response has been low-key. The Soviets added two minesweepers to the Persian Gulf, but are not deploying more capable combatants.

-- The Soviets continue to escort arms carriers and Kuwaiti-chartered Soviet tankers through the Gulf.

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